

A Mystery Story  
From the Pen of  
Melville Davisson  
Post.  
Master of Mystery,  
Who Here Presents  
an Interesting Study  
of Widely Varying  
Characters Which  
Clash in a Plot  
of Sustained Interest

SIR HENRY MARQUIS, chief of the criminal investigation department of Scotland Yard, has a monograph on this case. He said we were accustomed to believe that the dead were impotent in human affairs, but it was a thing of which no man could be certain. How could we know whether the power of those gone out of sight and hearing waxed or waned or ceased, or by what means or in what manner they might be able to move the living to their will. He said this case profoundly interested him.

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WE stopped in the pine woods to fill the world. It was low and soft, a sort of vague, elfin music, appearing as by some enchantment.

There was this strange quality in it—that it appeared to emerge from the wood itself.

I stopped beside Sir Henry Marquis on the path. Behind us was the village and its inn, where we had gone for luncheon at the end of our motor journey from London that morning. And before us at the end of the path through the wood, was the lovely, artistic house that my father's wife had built here for this romantic marriage after my father's death. Now that she, too, was dead, it remained in the possession of this Hungarian fiddler.

When one considered the man alone, when one looked coolly at him, it was past belief that my stepmother should have been so infatuated with the Count Andreas. It must have been this music that had entranced the woman. Out of the spell of it she seemed to be also out of the spell of this strange creature. For when she lay dying in her London house, she expressed the wish that a bracelet of Burmese rubies in the count's possession should be given to me. And when her solicitor pointed out that the verbal wish could have no effect against the count's resistance she said: "I will return and make him do it!"

Count Andreas would make no reply to my solicitor. And so on this morning I went with Sir Henry Marquis, chief of the criminal investigation department of Scotland Yard, to this interview with him. The verities of justice were on my side. The rubies had come from my American mother, had been passed on by my father to his second wife, and now, by operation of the English law, this Hungarian fiddler took them.

He had gone from my solicitor to Sir Henry Marquis, for he had known my mother in the old days and remained a friend. He promised to help me.

"We shall go down and see this Count Andreas. I know something of him."

And so we had come down on this August morning. We could see the grass terrace before the house, for the house stood on a shelf of the moor—a space had been cut out of the pine woods for it—and this green terrace, flanked by the woods on either side, and the house behind, looked down on the sea. It was 200 feet above, but one could have cast a stone into the water. The brow of the moor here dropped like a plummet into the ocean.

The music came from the terrace. We could hear a man walking about on it, violin at his shoulder, his hand flying. And in the glamour of the melodies he was a sylvan creature, but when he stepped out of it he was the Hungarian fiddler.

He stepped out of it as we came up, but he was a very clever person, carefully dressed and with a suave demeanor.

"It is Sir Henry Marquis," he said, "and Miss Sarah Whitney. I am honored."

Then he spoke directly to Sir Henry Marquis.

"You arrive quickly. My telegram to Scotland Yard could not have reached London before an hour of noon."

I caught the fleeting evidence of surprise in Sir Henry's face, but there was no surprise in his voice or manner. He had journeyed here at the call of any telegram from the count to Scotland Yard, but his profession was not one permitting of surprises. I wondered what Delphic answer he could make.

"What are the details of this matter?" he said.

It was a key that would fit any lock.

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THE count put his violin down carefully on a stone seat and went with us toward a window on the first floor of the house on the farther side. The house sat parallel with the terrace in its longest direction. There was a hall in the center and a staircase going up, and on one side the drawing room, with the dining room on the opposite side across the hall. It was not a large house, but it was beautifully designed, and its furnishings were artistic.

But Count Andreas did not go on directly to the window. He stopped.

"It was all very cleverly done," he said. "There was no sound. I am proud to know if the man was alone or had an accomplice."

"Were you alone in the house?"

Again it was a key for any lock, for he did not know what was before him and whether it had happened in the night or day, or, in fact, what it was in which a woman had been concerned.

"I am very careless," Andreas said; "I sleep here alone. The servants come out from the village of a morning, but I have no fear."

"It is very dangerous," said Sir Henry, "to have no fear."

"I am not a practical man," said the count, "or else I would have taken my wife's jewels to London and a bank vault; but I wished her room in this house to remain as she left it—nothing has been changed or

# The PHANTOM WOMAN



SIR HENRY TURNED TO COUNT ANDREAS. "GRAVITY HAS BEEN NEGATIVELY HERE," HE SAID. "THIS WILL BE A SORT OF MIRACLE."

moved in it; the dust and the spiders have their way—I had forgotten that my jewels remained in a little drawer of her writing table.

Then he turned quickly about to me, as though some sharp, amazing thing had suddenly occurred to him.

"Alas! Miss Sarah," he cried, "you will be a loser with me, for the ruby bracelet about which you wrote me is gone with the other jewels."

The words were like a blow to me, for I had hoped to recover this heirloom of my mother's—this bracelet of rubies set in a goldwork that shined between the stones. It was of some value, and had been in my mother's family for a hundred years.

I suppose I must have looked the despair I felt, and I could not keep back a mist of tears.

Sir Henry touched me gently.

"Perhaps we shall find it," he said. And he went on behind the Hungarian, who had faced about after the delivery of this blow. He also hoped that the jewels would be recovered, he said. No doubt Sir Henry Marquis would find them. Scotland Yard was so wonderful and wise.

Sir Henry followed him to the window. At the top of the French casement window, of little square panes of glass, and opening from the drawing room directly onto the terrace. There were a small bed for flowers directly under this window. The count directed Sir Henry's attention first to the window, and after that to the flower bed below it.

"Here," he said, "the thief entered; the bolt fastening the window was probably turned from the inside for a long time, or by collusion with one of the servants. You will observe that when the window is unfastened the knob stands perpendicular to the frame, and precisely the same position as when it is closed; so no one would notice that it was unfastened. You can see that the thief was a woman, a woman about the size of Miss Whitney. There are her tracks, quite clearly marked in the soft earth of this flower bed below the window."

Sir Henry examined these footprints.

"The lady," he said, "has been very considerate of us. These faint footprints are in the very best position on the soft earth to remain clear."

Then he turned to Count Andreas: "But why do you say 'a woman' about the size of Miss Whitney?"

The man hesitated, as though puzzled to find a reply, then he gave the reason:

"I was thinking of my wife's maids," he said. "They have been all women of about Miss Whitney's size; and this robbery will be the work of some one familiar with the house."

"On the contrary," replied Sir Henry, "these footprints were made by a thin woman—Miss Whitney will weigh ten stone—an incredibly thin woman."

The count was astonished.

"Look at the print," he said; "these footprints might have been made by Miss Sarah Whitney."

Sir Henry turned to me.

"Quite so," he said; "the prints here might have been made by Miss Whitney's slipper if there were no such thing as gravity." Then he addressed me directly. "Sarah," he said, "will you kindly walk from the flag path of the terrace to this window and stand a moment before it?"

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I DID as he directed, although I was puzzled to understand what it meant. Was I, perhaps, to be indicated as the thief?

Count Andreas cried out in confirmation of Sir Henry:

"You see, the prints are almost identical."

"Ah, go!" replied Sir Henry; "But you fail to note the important feature. You will observe that the heel of Miss Whitney's slipper sank into the turf on her way from the flag path, and here in the flower bed it makes a deep footprint; while the heel of this other woman's shoe cannot be seen on the turf, which she must have crossed from the path. These footprints are clear but faint. These evidences could mean only one thing—an absence of weight!"

Then he stooped suddenly over as though to look closely at the footprints, but he was looking, rather,

Count Andreas by a famous Italian, in a single frame. It hung over the mantel.

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THE room gave evidence that it had been long closed; the dust lay in it and a great spider web stretched along the bottom of the frame to the wall below it.

But the room was in disorder; everything in it had been opened, pulled out and searched. This search had been minute and thorough. It was the work of some one going carefully, to be sure that no place of concealment would remain unopened.

Count Andreas made a gesture to indicate this disorder.

"It is I," he said, "who have searched the room. I took this robbery to be the work of some discharged maid or her accomplice; such a one would know that I am leaving England and that the house will be presently closed. She might, therefore, conceal the jewels about the room here, in some other place, intending to return later when the house was closed and regain them. This would greatly reduce the risk in the robbery, because the ruby bracelet especially is a piece of conspicuous jewelry. Burmese stone, so large and of so pure a color, could not be accounted for if found in her possession, and the goldwork about them is distinguished. And, in the second place, I wished to be certain that my wife had not, herself, placed these jewels elsewhere in some drawer of the room, instead of the little drawer of her desk, which was open."

But the room was closed; the thief entered by this door, but I have theory that this door was no bar to the sort of creature that accomplished this robbery. Burmese stone, so large and of so pure a color, could not be accounted for if found in her possession, and the goldwork about them is distinguished. And, in the second place, I wished to be certain that my wife had not, herself, placed these jewels elsewhere in some drawer of the room, instead of the little drawer of her desk, which was open."

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